

## **Profile of Christian Church in Tennessee**

**October 31, 2024**

The Christian Church in Tennessee has 57 Disciples of Christ churches in Tennessee along with one just over the border in Mississippi. There is great diversity within the region. Our churches are spread across the three grand divisions of Tennessee, with 23 in Western Tennessee, 20 in Middle Tennessee, and 13 in East Tennessee. There are about 500 miles between Bethel Christian Church in Jonesborough, TN and Graceland Christian in Southaven, MS. The Tennessee region has several of the largest churches in the denomination, including Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, New Direction Christian Church in Memphis, and Woodmont Christian Church in Nashville, along with many small congregations in rural, suburban and urban locations. The ethnic diversity of the churches reflects the diversity of the region. Much of the recent growth has been in Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) congregations. The 2021 Disciples of Christ Yearbook notes a total of 13,776 members. Average worship attendance is 90, with total outreach giving of \$1,141,619.

For decades, the Tennessee Region has hosted generations of Disciples at Bethany Hills Camp & Conference Center. On sprawling 315 acres just west of Nashville, the Lodge is the central meeting place with a welcoming gathering space, wrap-around porch and dorm-style sleeping rooms. Nestled around the main building are cabins, a dining hall, a swimming pool, a chapel by the lake and more. Attendance at the camp has not rebounded since a COVID shutdown. At the 2024 Tennessee Regional Assembly, the budget presented and approved broke out the budget deficit for Bethany Hills at \$105,000. While more work remains, we have made facilities improvements at Bethany Hills. The current Interim Regional Minister and Tennessee Regional Board are actively discerning the future of the camp and changes that may be needed.

The Christian Church in Tennessee faces similar challenges to most Disciples Regions. These include declines in membership, attendance and offerings in the face of increased operating expenses. There have been limited church startups in recent years and several congregations closed. However two existing congregations, Anointed Temple of Praise and The Village Church, have been welcomed into the Region.

Despite the challenges, the Region is committed to serving our denomination, our churches, and our communities. Our mission is to amplify each church's call to be formed by Jesus' love by connecting the region, church to church, into an extended open table where everyone knows they can receive the unmistakable grace of God. Over the past decade, we have strengthened key ministries, including Disciples Women and Men. We have added Pro Reconciliation/Anti Racism training as a mandatory requirement for clergy standing.

As a church, we are energized about the next chapter of our ministry. We recognize that strong, faithful, nimble leadership is the key to our future. We are seeking a Regional Minister who

- embraces diversity
- has theological imagination
- provides vision casting for new ministries in a new world
- is adept at providing both deep scriptural teaching and spiritual nurturing
- has business acumen and strong connections within Disciples of Christ

We are willing to dream big to serve our Lord. Since our last visioning process occurred just two weeks before the COVID lockdown, we have both a need and an opportunity for a fresh look at what the future can bring. In today's fragmented world, we believe that the Disciples message is more vital than ever.

The Tennessee Region congratulates Dr. Christal Williams on her new assignment. Our region is led by Interim Regional Minister, Rev. Kevin L. McNeil. Currently, a regional search committee has been formed and is undertaking the ministry of seeking to fill the role. We welcome a leader that will join us in our shared mission and vision that will lead us into a stronger , more unified connection, so that we can welcome all to the Lord's Table.